The Cotton Rush

Trace how migration reshaped land, farming, and labor in Alabama.

SS24.AS.8 "Explain the impact of "Alabama Fever" on the settlement of Alabama and the growth of agriculture and slavery in the territory."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons settlers rushed into Alabama, circle two details that connect cotton farming to slavery, and number three details in order to show how Native land loss led to settlement and cotton production.

What Was Alabama Fever?

1. In the 1810s, news of land in what is now Alabama traveled along roads and through letters. People called the rush to move there "Alabama Fever." Many white families and land speculators hoped to buy farms, especially where soil suited cotton. But the land was not empty. Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee people lived in the region and held ties to it. After the Creek War, the 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson forced the Creek Nation to give up millions of acres. Federal land sales then made much of that land available to incoming settlers.

2. As migrants poured in, Alabama became a separate U.S. territory in 1817 and a state in 1819. Some settlers arrived with enslaved people; others purchased enslaved people through domestic slave traders. Cotton planting expanded across the rich soils of the Black Belt and beyond. Demand from textile mills raised cotton's value, and the cotton gin made removing seeds faster. Growing more cotton required more land and labor. Planters cleared fields and forced enslaved people to plant, tend, and pick the crop. Their unpaid work created wealth for slaveholders, while enslaved families endured violence and separation.

3. The rush changed who controlled land and who did the work. New roads, farms, and towns spread as settlers moved into areas that Native nations had long occupied. Treaties pressured or forced Native nations to cede land, and later removals drove many people from their homes. Meanwhile, the expanding cotton economy increased the demand for enslaved labor. Slaveholders brought enslaved people into Alabama and bought others in a domestic trade that tore families apart. Some newcomers grew food crops, but large cotton plantations depended heavily on forced labor. "Alabama Fever" helped drive agricultural growth alongside Native dispossession and the expansion of slavery.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the forced Creek land cession help fuel Alabama Fever?

2. Why did cotton production grow as settlers moved into Alabama? Give two reasons from the passage.

3. How did growing cotton production expand slavery in Alabama? Explain the need for labor and how slaveholders obtained it.

4. How did Alabama Fever affect Native nations and enslaved families while benefiting incoming landowners?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine an 1820 land advertisement says, “Alabama's cotton lands offer opportunity for everyone.” Write a 75 to 95 word response correcting that claim. Explain how migration changed settlement and cotton farming, who lost land, and whose forced labor made cotton profits possible.

ANSWER KEY

The Cotton Rush

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.AS.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons settlers rushed into Alabama, circle two details that connect cotton farming to slavery, and number three details in order to show how Native land loss led to settlement and cotton production. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the forced Creek land cession help fuel Alabama Fever?	**The cession allowed federal land sales that made more land available to incoming settlers.**
2	Why did cotton production grow as settlers moved into Alabama? Give two reasons from the passage.	**Settlers found rich soil suited to cotton, and demand from textile mills raised its value. The cotton gin also made seed removal faster.**
3	How did growing cotton production expand slavery in Alabama? Explain the need for labor and how slaveholders obtained it.	**More cotton fields required more workers. Slaveholders brought enslaved people to Alabama and purchased others through domestic slave traders.**
4	How did Alabama Fever affect Native nations and enslaved families while benefiting incoming landowners?	**Native nations lost land through forced or pressured cessions and later removals. Enslaved people were forced to grow cotton, and sales separated families, while landowners gained farms and profits.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

That advertisement leaves out the people whose lives made its promise possible. After the Creek Nation was forced to cede millions of acres, federal sales opened land to incoming settlers. Many grew cotton in fertile soil, and mills wanted the crop. But this was not an opportunity for everyone. Native communities lost control of land they had occupied for generations. Slaveholders forced enslaved people to clear fields and raise cotton, and some families were separated through sales. The wealth went to slaveholders, not to the people whose land and labor they took.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of cotton's growth, including faster seed removal by the cotton gin. For Part 3, look for connected effects on settlement, agriculture, Native landholding, and enslaved labor rather than a list of facts.